

Message Text

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PAGE 01 QUEBEC 00088 021602Z
ACTION EUR-12

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C O N F I D E N T I A L QUEBEC 0088

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y PARA NBRD 6

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, CA
SUBJECT: POLLSTER PREDICTS NO INDEPENDENCE FOR QUEBEC

JOINT MONTREAL/QUEBEC MESSAGE

SUMMARY: RESPECTED MCGILL UNIVERSITY POLLING SPECIALIST,
MAURICE PINARD, TELLS US HE IS CONVINCED INDEPENDENCE
REFERENDUM WILL NOT SUCCEED. WHILE WORDING OF QUESTION WILL BE
VITAL IN DETERMINING PEOPLE'S CHOICE, HE EMPHASIZED THAT
QUESTION MUST BE SUFFICIENTLY COGENT TO PROVIDE "LEGITIMATE"
REFLECTION OF OPINION. PINARD ALSO POINTED OUT THAT
P.Q. IS VULNERABLE TO FEDERALIST ATTACK
IN ITS ADVOCACY OF ECONOMIC ASSOCIATION WITH CANADA
AFTER INDEPENDENCE. P.Q. SUPPORT IS NOT GROWING
AMONG TWO IMPORTANT SEGMENTS OF FRANCOPHONE
POPULATION, I.E. ORGANIZED LABOR AND SMALL BUSINESSMEN.
PINARD BELIEVES, SHOULD P.Q. LOSE REFERENDUM, THEY COULD
BENEFIT FROM SYMPATHETIC VOTER REACTION IF THEY CALLED
ELECTION IMMEDIATELY AFTERWARDS. "MONTREAL STAR" COLUMNIST,
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PAGE 02 QUEBEC 00088 021602Z

DOMINIQUE CLIFT, IS PUZZLED BY "INFLEXIBLE POSTURE" TRUDEAU
PRESENTS TO QUEBEC. HE ATTRIBUTES PM'S ATTITUDE, IN PART, TO
TRUDEAU'S ISOLATION AND FACT NO ONE DARES TELL HIM WHERE HE IS GOING
WRONG. END SUMMARY

1. RESPECTED MCGILL UNIVERSITY POLLING SPECIALIST, MAURICE

PINARD, WHO IS ONE OF RARE SEERS WHO PREDICTED P.Q. ELECTORAL VICTORY, RECENTLY TOLD CONSULS GENERAL HARPER AND MCNAMARA THAT HE IS CONVINCED REFERENDUM ON INDEPENDENCE WILL BE DEFEATED. SUPPORT FOR INDEPENDENCE, HE SAID, IS NOW RUNNING ABOUT 15 PERCENT AFTER HAVING FALLEN TO 11 PERCENT IMMEDIATELY AFTER NOVEMBER 15TH ELECTION. BEFORE ELECTION, IT HAD BEEN STABLE IN RECENT YEARS AT ABOUT 20 PERCENT OF THOSE POLLED. WHEN ADJUSTED FOR UNDECIDED, PINARD ESTIMATES SUPPORT NEVER SURPASSED 25 PERCENT OF ELECTORATE. WORDING OF QUESTION PUT TO POPULATION IN REFERENDUM MAY BE CRITICAL, BUT QUESTION MUST BE SUFFICIENTLY COGENT TO GIVE IT LEGITIMACY. OTHERWISE, FEDERALIST OPPONENTS COULD CHALLENGE VALIDITY OF REFERENDUM.

2. PINARD DOUBTS ANY ISSUE LIKELY ARISE BETWEEN FEDERAL GOVERNMENT AND QUEBEC WHICH WOULD HAVE SUFFICIENT IMPACT TO OVERCOME WHAT HE SEES AS "INCREASING FEARS" AMONG ORDINARY QUEBECOIS OF DIRE ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES OF INDEPENDENCE. IN HIS OPINION, ONLY AN ACTION WHICH TAKES AWAY SOME EXISTING RIGHT WOULD BE POTENT ENOUGH TO MUSTER A MAJORITY VOTE FOR INDEPENDENCE. OTHER ISSUES, THOUGH STRONGLY EMOTIVE, AIMED AT GRANTING NEW RIGHTS OR ADVANTAGES, SUCH AS AIR CONTROLLER'S CONTROVERSY, ARE NOT STRONG ENOUGH IN HIS OPINION TO INCREASE SIGNIFICANTLY SUPPORT FOR INDEPENDENCE. P.Q.'S RECOGNITION OF NEED FOR CONTINUED ECONOMIC ASSOCIATION WITH THE REST OF CANADA MAKES THEIR DEMANDS FOR INDEPENDENCE SUSPECT IN MANY EYES. IT IS AN ADMISSION OF VULNERABILITY AND OF DEPENDENCE, PINARD ASSERTED.

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PAGE 03 QUEBEC 00088 021602Z

3. "PARTI QUEBECOIS" SUPPORT DOES NOT APPEAR TO BE INCREASING AMONG IMPORTANT GROUPS IN FRANCOPHONE POPULATION SUCH AS TRADE UNIONS AND SMALL BUSINESSMEN. PINARD GUAGES ANTAGONISM TOWARDS P.Q., WHICH SEEMS TO BE GROWING IN SMALL BUSINESS COMMUNITY, COULD BE CRITICAL ELEMENT IN ERODING PARTY SUPPORT. SMALL BUSINESSMEN ENJOY WIDE INFLUENCE AND PRESTIGE ESPECIALLY IN SMALL TOWNS AND IN RURAL AREAS.

4. DISCUSSING P.Q. TACICS, PINARD COMMENTED THAT IF HE WERE LEVESQUE, HE WOULD HOLD REFERENDUM TOWARD END OF GOVERNMENT'S TERM OF OFFICE SOME FOUR YEARS HENCE. SHOULD REFERENDUM FAIL, AS HE BELIEVES IT WILL, HE WOULD THEN CALL A GENERAL ELECTION IMMEDIATELY. P.Q., HE IS CONFIDENT, WOULD WIN SUCH AN ELECTION. PRESENT GOVERNMENT IS BROADLY POPULAR AMONG POPULATION. SUPPORT FOR INDEPENDENCE IS ONLY ISSUE WHICH LIMITS THIS POPULARITY. ON BASIS

OF HIS STUDY OF QUEBEC VOTER PSYCHOLOGY, PINARD BELIEVES FRANCO-PHONES WOULD BE OVERCOME WITH SYMPATHY FOR P.Q. AFTER REFERENDUM DEFEAT AND MANY WHO VOTED AGAINST REFERENDUM WOULD THEN SUPPORT P.Q. REELECTION.

5. "MONTREAL STAR" COLUMNIST, DOMINIQUE CLIFT, WHOM CONSULS GENERAL SAW ON SAME DAY, ALSO NOTED THAT ORGANIZED LABOR AND SMALL BUSINESS COMMUNITY ARE CRITICALLY IMPORTANT IF P.Q. IS TO EXPAND ITS POPULAR SUPPORT. HE CONFIRMED THAT SUPPORT FOR PARTY HAS BEEN WEAK AMONG THESE GROUPS. CLIFT ADMITTED TO BEING BAFFLED BY "INFLEXIBLE POSTURE" TRUDEAU IS PRESENTING TO QUEBEC. IT IS OUT OF TUNE WITH QUEBEC REALITY, CLIFT SAID. IN HIS VISITS TO OTTAWA, CLIFT CAN FIND NO REASONABLE EXPLANATION FOR TRUDEAU UNWILLINGNESS TO TAKE INITIATIVE IN OFFERING ATTRACTIVE CONCESSIONS TO QUEBEC WHICH WOULD UNDERCUT P.Q. INDEPENDENCE PLANS. TRUDEAU SEEMS TO BE COMMITTING GRAVE TACTICAL BLUNDER. IN PART, CLIFT MUSED, MISCALCULATION SEEMS RESULT FROM FACT THAT NO ONE AROUND HIM DARES TELL TRUDEAU WHERE HE IS GOING WRONG.

6. COMMENT: PINARD IS CERTAINLY CORRECT IN HIS ASSESSMENT OF PRESENT ATTITUDES TOWARDS INDEPENDENCE. HE WILL BE ABLE FURTHER
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PAGE 04 QUEBEC 00088 021602Z

TO VERIFY HIS ASSUMPTIONS IN ABOUT TWO WEEKS WHEN, HE TOLD US, A POLL WILL BE RELEASED WHICH IS NOW BEING TAKEN ON ATTITUDES TOWARDS INDEPENDENCE AND ON VOTER SUPPORT FOR P.Q. FOR LONGER TERM
PICTURE, IT IS DIFFICULT TO SHARE HIS CERTAINTY IN THE INABILITY OF P.Q. TO INCREASE SUPPORT FOR INDEPENDENCE. THERE ARE LIKELY BE MANY UNFORSEEABLE ELEMENTS INFLUENCING ATTITUDES TO WARRANT SUCH ASSURANCE. WE CONTINUE BELIEVE PROBABILITY IS WEIGHTED AGAINST INDEPENDENCE. HOWEVER, WE ALSO BELIEVE MAJOR CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGE FURTHER LOOSENING THE CONFEDERATION TO BE VIRTUALLY INEVITABLE AND SOME FORM OF POLITICAL SOVEREIGNTY REMAINS A STRONG POSSIBILITY. MCNAMARA

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